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ABSTRACT

This digest offers basic information about resources, available to users of personal computers, in the area of professional development in special education. Two types of resources are described: those that can be purchased on computer diskettes and those made available by linking personal computers through electronic telephone networks. Resources described include: (1) portions of the ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) database available on diskette; (2) Bibliographic Retrieval Services (BRS) and Dialog information services, which make available the Exceptional Child Education Resources database and the complete ERIC database; (3) ERIC on CD-ROM (compact disk read only memory); (4) SpecialNet, an electronic communications network designed for special educators; (5) Special Education Solutions, an online database of resources available to Apple computer users who are disabled; and (6) the IBM/Special Needs Exchange available through the CompuServe Information Service. (JDD)

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ERIC Digest

DIGEST #429

Revised 1989

USING PERSONAL COMPUTERS TO ACQUIRE SPECIAL EDUCATION INFORMATION

Personal computers (also known as *home computers* or *PCs*) can provide access to a variety of information in special education including professional literature, curricular and resource materials, training events, and news. They also make it possible for computer users to communicate with each other. This digest answers some basic questions about resources for professional development that are available to users of personal computers.

Two types of resources are described: those that can be purchased on computer diskettes and those made available by linking personal computers through electronic telephone networks. This digest will be most useful to readers who are somewhat familiar with the operation of personal computers.

Using a Personal Computer as a Self-Contained Unit

Many types of references that previously were available only in books or through electronic search services are now available on diskette. Owning a diskette version of this type of material gives quick access to the information at any time and, because of the computer's search capability, can make it much easier to find the specific information you need.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources has made selected portions of the ERIC database available on diskettes for use with most personal computers. ERIC citations on Computer Literacy and on Microcomputer Software/Hardware Evaluation and Selection are available, and database diskettes on Library/Information Science and Educational Technology are available in quarterly updates beginning with 1982. Each of the quarterly updates contains 250 to 350 citations on the appropriate topic entered in the ERIC system by ERIC/IR.

For further information contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, Syracuse University, School of Education, 150 Marshall Street, Huntington Hall, Room 030, Syracuse, NY 13244 (1-315-443-3640).

Using a Personal Computer for Networking

Networking refers to the capability of computers to communicate with other computers. To do this, a microcomputer is attached to a modem, an electronic device that converts the computer's binary code to auditory signals and sends the signals to other computers via a telephone line. In this manner, individuals can access the information stored in many other computers, even those that are thousands of miles away. By using telecommunications, individuals can contact large data banks, information services, or electronic bulletin boards.

BRS and Dialog

Two services make their online education databases available to individuals. BRS/After Dark and DIALOG's Knowledge Index both use a simple system whereby words or phrases are used to locate relevant documents. The services to individuals are simplified versions of the regular search services used primarily by libraries, resource centers, businesses, and other organizations. Many public libraries and university libraries offer searches of these systems to individuals. The fees for such services vary considerably.

Both BRS and DIALOG offer access to the ERIC and Exceptional Child Education Resources (ECER) databases, descriptions of which follow. Each system also offers other related databases covering such areas as vocational education, educational testing, and the professional literature in psychology and sociology.

For further information contact DIALOG/Knowledge Index, 3460 Hillview Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94304 (1-800-334-2564) and BRS/After Dark, 1200 Route 7, Latham, NY 12110 (1-800-468-0908 or 1-800-345-4277).

The ECER Database

The Exceptional Child Education Resources (ECER) database provides wide coverage of all types of professional literature in special education including books, journal articles, reports, dissertations, instructional materials, and nonprint media. ECER also includes most of the special education literature that goes into the ERIC database. ECER is developed and maintained by The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091 (1-703-620-3660).

The ERIC Database

The ERIC database provides bibliographic information on over 200,000 journal articles and nearly as many other education-related documents. The 16 ERIC Clearinghouses, each with a different scope of interest, contribute information to the database. The Council for Exceptional Children operates the ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children. Over 2,000 items are added to the database each year by this clearinghouse alone.

ERIC on CD-ROM

Three vendors are currently offering the ERIC database on CD-ROM (compact disk read only memory): DIALOG (1-800-334-2564), OCLC (1-614-764-6000), and SilverPlatter (1-617-239-0306). This technology allows a search of ERIC via a personal computer attached to a CD-ROM player. However, the costs range in the area of $800 per year. The cost is fixed, which allows libraries an alternative to on-line searching, but it is not geared for individuals at the present time.

Electronic Communications Network

SpecialNet is an electronic communications network designed for special educators. This system is operated by GTE Education Services, Inc., in Washington, DC. SpecialNet has two functions. First, it provides an electronic mail service that allows subscribers to send private messages to other

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SpecialNet subscribers. Second, it provides a number of electronic bulletin boards where public information on diverse topics can be listed and accessed by any subscriber. Many of these bulletin boards are also online databases; the information put on the bulletin boards is collected and made available for online searching on a long-term basis.

Following are some of SpecialNet's bulletin boards:

AIDS	GIFTED
BILINGUAL	LITIGATION
CAREER.CONNECTION	PRACTICES
CEC.NEWS	RURAL
COMPUTER	SEVERE
CONFERENCE	SOFTWARE
CSPD	SPEC.ED.NEEDS
DEAFNESS	TRANSITION
EARLYCHILDHOOD	VISION
EMPLOYMENT	VOCED
FEDERAL	

The annual subscription fee to SpecialNet is $200. No minimum use per month is required. Contact Anna Snodgrass at GTE Education Services, Inc., 2021 K Street, NW, Suite 215, Washington DC 20006 (1-202-835-7300).

Apple SPECIAL EDUCATION SOLUTIONS

SPECIAL EDUCATION SOLUTIONS is an online database of resources available to Apple computer users who are disabled. Maintained by Apple's Office of Special Education, it currently contains close to 1,000 entries describing adaptive devices, specialized software, support organizations, and publications. New entries are added regularly. Every authorized Apple dealer can help locate the information needed to tailor an Apple computer to the requirements and learning styles of disabled children and adults. For further information, call 1-800-538-9696. Apple Computer also sponsors the Apple Bulletin Board on SpecialNet.

IBM/Special Needs Exchange

The IBM/Special Needs Exchange is an online information resource available nationwide through the CompuServe Information Service. It is designed to promote sharing of information among users. It features a wide variety of resources including information on educational software and computer technology products and programs. The Exchange is coordinated by LINC Resources and is sponsored by IBM. Contact CompuServe (1-800-848-8990 or 1-614-457-8650).

For More Information

Two ERIC digests provide more detail on using ERIC electronically: "Accessing ERIC With Your Microcomputer" and "New Access Points to ERIC—CD-ROM Versions." Both digests are available from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, Syracuse University, School of Education, 150 Marshall Street, Huntington Hall, Room 030, Syracuse, NY 13244-2340 (1-315-443-3640).

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